Final made it to Rwanda. It took 14 hours of air to get to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, commonly referred to as simply “Addis“. I have always dreamed of coming to Africa. Grant and I have discussed it over the decades as we read books by the Great White-Hunter, Peter Hathaway Capstick. I’ve met several Africans over the past years, starting with the wonderful “Kenya”, whose real name I found out is, Eric Mugore.

From Addis, it took several hours in a sleepy daze to arrive at Kigali. We made a stop in Entebbe, Uganda, which I was not expecting. If I had not overheard someone telling his friend, this is not Kigali, I would have gotten off the plane. When I did arrive, my mind was running on only half its cylinders. Maybe 3, I dunno. Never could determine.

Thinking back in 2004, after spending several days in the dark, musty, stagnant transient tents at the Karshi, Uzbekistan airbase, I stepped out onto the flightline in Kandahar. If it was not over 100 degrees then, it had to have been in the upper 90s, especially out on the tarmac. I distinctly remembering the sun, heat and dry air. I stood there seeing the base radar tower with the mountains in the background, and thinking, “This is my place now.” I believe to this day, that first thought about Afghanistan, helped me sustain my peace of mind while there. It was a good feeling, but it was not at my core.

I remember arriving in Moscow, Russia several years ago, and thought to myself, “This is Russia”. No somersaults or head spinning, but, “this is Russia”. I sensed the antiquity of the country with its long and dark history. The Arts added a passion to being there, a show of the true personality of its people over the decades. It was beautiful, but austere being there.

Here it is different. It was not until I slept for 12 hours, and mindlessly took a long shower, and headed to the 4th floor for breakfast, drank a pot of coffee, allowed my vitamins to kick in, did I fully realize I was finally in Africa. I did not realize how much I had wanted to be here until then. As the thoughts came to light, I actually started shedding tears. This is an indication of things coming from the depths of the soul. After eating a breakfast of some sort of meat and cheeses, and fruits I was unaware of, I sat looking out over the city.

The restaurant is called “The Panorama”. It’s not a true panorama, but it does have one side open to the outside. No windows, just open. I sat away from the side, because my eyes were very upset on having to wake up. But as the pot of coffee went through, they began to gaze out onto the countryside and could not look away. I was only seeing a mere eyelash of Africa, but it was enough to feed a passion. I sat over an hour and a half, just taking in the fact I am here. I may change my mind in a few years, but right now, when I become old and decrepit, I wish to be placed in a nursing home with a view of Africa.

I’ve taken my little laptop outside under a tree by the poolside bar to write this. The air is different from home, the weather warm, sunny and the scents are natural. That is the best way to describe it. Just natural. Even in my sleepy daze in Addis, I could detect the scents of Africa. You smell the people, which is not fresh, but natural. Africa is a mixture of many of these scents. Flowers, with the smell of dung, the smell of sweat, and the smell of freshly dug soil. Add the smell of a tumbleweed. If you ever dressed out an animal, there is the smell of Africa. When you cut down a tree, the smell of the damp wood is Africa. In the evenings, there is a smell of burning wood. If you took a dozen different types of hardwood and threw them on a fire, that is what you smell and it is comforting.

Years ago, I sat thinking how to describe the humor of Africa, specifically from “Kenya”. The only way to describe it, would be ”rich”. Not rich as in wealth, but rich like the black earth of the banks of the River Nile. Perhaps not ironic, their humor involves cutting and keeling. (killing) I find the country to be the same. “rich” and “earthy”.

I am staying at the Hôtel des Mille Collines. This is the famous hotel that housed over a thousand people during the Rwandan Genocide in 1994. The manager and his wife kept these people from being killed. A movie was made, titled Hotel Rwanda. I bought and watched it before coming here. I am drawn to movies of heroism, based on real life. Forget Hollywood. There is no way it can produce anything as real and believable as what takes place in reality.

Most of the guests here at the hotel are white. You find many mixed couples here, and in the evenings, I see several men who have temporary wives with them. As I sat at the poolside bar listening to a reggae band playing, one pretty black lady stopped by and commented to me that I was sitting alone. I replied I was indeed and it was best I sat alone, have a good evening.

In comparing the people here with elsewhere, they are friendly and genuinely glad you are here. The Afghans in Kandahar were friendly and curious, but untrusting. I actually sensed evil in some of them. The Muscovites were a large mixture. Some friendly and courteous, others didn’t want you there. They are a very racist group of people. It was always necessary to “watch over my shoulder.” The Africans I have met during the past years are leery of me at first, but then would open up. They are a delight to talk to. But I really need my wife with me to help interpret their accent. Or my accent to them. So at breakfast, I wanted to talk to one of them, yet not hold any conversation. So, after the waiter brought my coffee pot, I said, “Good Morning”. He looked at me and said, “Morning…”. Then added, “.. has finally come.” That was enough for today.

It is now Sunday morning. I need to venture out some and find a small store. My razor did not survive the baggage handlers, and I had to shave this morning holding it together.

Love #6, Dad, fred, OG, D.